

Public hearing to be held on perchlorate

By Mary Manning
LAS VEGAS SUN

Las Vegas residents are complaining that they have been ignored by a national perchlorate conference under way this week in Henderson to inform scientists and stakeholders about the rocket-fuel booster present in water.

The solid-fuel oxidizer perchlorate — a salt that dissolves in water — has been discovered in the water supplies of four

Western states, including Las Vegas' drinking water.

The Colorado River contamination could affect 23 million people drawing water to drink and grow crops.

"Where is the public?" biologist Larry Paulson asked as 200 experts gathered Tuesday at the Henderson Convention Center. Their three-day forum is designed to sort out an array of facts gathered on the chemical in the past year.

In an effort to answer the public's questions, the Defense Department and the Environmental Protection Agency have scheduled a public hearing from 7 to 9 tonight at the Henderson Convention Center, 200 Water St.

Robert Hall, director of the Nevada Environmental Coalition, said he was concerned that scientists aren't studying other

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ways that perchlorate can enter the body, such as through showers or swimming.

While perchlorate can affect human thyroid glands, scientists don't know whether it stunts growth in children or causes birth defects at the low levels found in California, Nevada, Arizona and Utah water.

California scientists learned last year how to measure chemical levels at parts per billion. That amounts to a single grain of sand tossed into an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

"Perchlorate has impacted Nevada significantly and came on our radar screen very suddenly," Allen Biaggi, deputy administrator of the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, said.

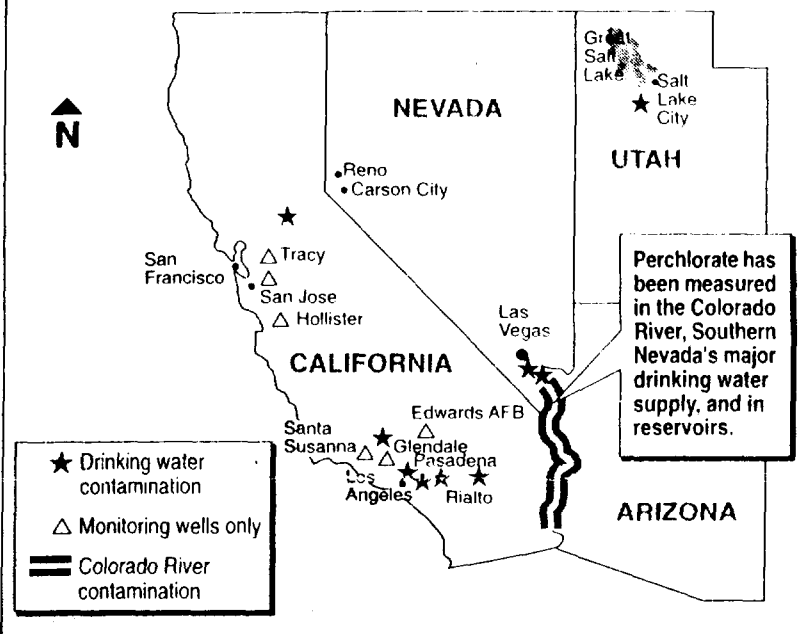
Some information will become available in September when the results of eight studies to determine the chemical's impact are released. Early evidence from treating patients of Grave's disease in the 1950s indicate the effects of perchlorate replacing iodine in the thyroid and changing white blood cells.

Southern Nevada hosted two plants near Henderson that made ammonium perchlorate for missiles and space shuttles from the 1950s. The American Pacific Corp.'s facility blew up in 1988, and operations were moved to outside Cedar City, Utah. A report released at the meeting claims that the company is not the cause of a stream of perchlorate that is draining into Lake Mead.

Kerr-McGee Corp. is building an evaporation pond and searching for a way to stop the shallow underground stream of

Perchlorate in Western states

Perchlorate, a rocket fuel oxidizer, has been discovered in wells and drinking supplies in four Western states. Health effects are not known.



Source: Environmental Protection Agency

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perchlorate-laced water from reaching Southern Nevada's drinking water, Pat Corbett, manager of the local plant, said. The pond should be ready at the end of the summer.

Both companies have cooperated with the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, Brenda Pohlmann said. She is in charge of corrective action for the state.

Representatives of five Indian tribes living along the Colorado River said they worry about drinking-water supplies, whether fish eaten by the tribes contain perchlorate and whether the chemical affects crops.

"Our children practically live in the river's waters," Earl Hawes, Quechan Indian tribe environmental project manager, said. The Quechans live

in Yuma, Ariz., where the river slows to a trickle because of upstream demands.

Enough lettuce is raised there to serve eight heads of the leafy vegetable to every man, woman and child in the United States, he said.

"If you eat lettuce, it was watered by the Colorado," he noted.